

# Navigating the Holiday Party Scene

By Molly Kimball

December is packed with parties and events to celebrate the holiday season. What better way to catch up with old friends, meet new ones, and just get out and enjoy yourself?

Unfortunately, the holidays are also filled with countless nutritional land mines. From tame office parties to blowout bashes with friends, the events unfold similarly: Get the party started with cocktails, followed by tempting hors d'oeuvres. There may or may not be a full dinner served, but you're guaranteed that there'll be a decadent sweet treat to end the party.

So what's a health-conscious New Orleanian to do?

Let's start with cocktails. Nutritionally speaking, cocktails can make or break the night, in more ways than one. Alcoholic drinks can be very high in calories, and too much alcohol can weaken even the strongest resolve, leaving you vulnerable to the rest of the party's temptations.

Try diluting wine or liquor with sparkling water or club soda—this cuts the calories and buffers the alcohol's effects. Have a wine spritzer, or vodka mixed with club soda, with just a splash of cranberry juice. Request a fancy glass, and your lower-cal drink will fit right in.

When it comes eating, become a food snob. Really, no kidding. Take a bite, and decide if it's really worth it. Crackers and mixed nuts, just like always? Take a pass. But the creamy sweet potato casserole topped with marshmallows that you never get to have? Go ahead and indulge—it's worth it!

Above all, remember the real focus of the party is not the food, it's the people. Stop grazing at the food table and make sure you've chatted with everyone you want to talk with. And at your next holiday celebration, raise a glass with friends, toasting another happy—and healthy—holiday season and New Year!

## Ask Molly

You've got questions? Our nutritionist, **Molly Kimball, LDN, RD**, as the answers.

**Q:** Dear Molly,

*I really enjoy your new column in New Orleans Living magazine. I was a little shy to write to you, but I figured, what the heck. These past four months I have realized that I am getting fat, and I guess now that I am hitting 30, my metabolism is slowing down. I have huge cravings for milk products, like cheese, ice cream and huge bowls of cereal. Do you think this is what is making me fat? Any suggestions?*

—Christine Assan - Old Metairie

Hi, Christine,

I'm glad you're enjoying the nutrition page!

Excess weight is a concern for a lot of us, but you'd never tell a girlfriend she's getting fat, so try to be a little nicer to yourself!

It's not likely that your metabolism has slowed tremendously just from hitting 30. However, it is a good idea to incorporate regular exercise—especially strength training—into your routine in order to maximize your body's calorie-burning potential.

My first thought is, why the craving for milk in particular? Are you getting enough calcium through your diet? If you're not getting at least three or four servings of calcium-rich foods a day (to total 1,200 mg daily), consider adding a calcium supplement to make up the difference.

It's not likely that the excess pounds are piling on simply because you're consuming too much dairy. It's probably more a result of the type of dairy you're eating. Ice cream and cheese can clearly add plenty of fat and calories your diet, but that doesn't mean you have to eliminate these yummy foods altogether. After all, who wants to forego their Rocky Road or gouda? Instead, buy portion-controlled servings, like snack-sized cheeses and single-serve cups of ice cream (or go out and get a kids scoop if you can't keep a box of the stuff in your house!). Cereal, as healthy as it can be, can look deceptively small when poured into your favorite bowl. It may be better to play it safe and buy single-serving boxes of cereal, as well.

Just a few small changes in your diet can quickly trim 500 calories daily (the amount in a large bowl of ice cream or a few bowls of cereal!), which can translate to losing a pound of fat a week.

Please write or email your questions or comments to [molly@livingneworleans.com](mailto:molly@livingneworleans.com), we'd love to hear from you.

## Restaurant of the Month

### Blue Tomato

4401 Jefferson Hwy.  
Jefferson, LA 70121  
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The outside décor is deceptively unassuming. Inside you'll find an eclectic, super-relaxed "hang-out" kind of setting at this Old Jefferson locale. There aren't too many places that can offer Mexican, Italian, and burgers, and pull it all off deliciously!

Though there's a lot at the Blue Tomato that would never make a "best of" healthy restaurant list (think Garbage Can Nachos!), the restaurant does have plenty of heart-healthy and waist-friendly options. The Italian shrimp and grilled chicken salad are delectable staples.

But truth be told, if you're at the Blue Tomato, you probably want something more indulgent than just a salad. The tequila lime or mango-marinated chicken breast is super lean and full of flavor. Same goes for the grilled yellowfin tuna.

The steak or chicken fajitas are great options, and you can always leave the side of tortillas wrapped in foil, if you're watching your carb intake.

The carnitas topped with fresh, chopped cilantro, onions and lime is my personal favorite. The pork is marinated in tequila, lime juice, orange juice, and garlic. It's roasted all night, leaving it perfectly melt-in-your-mouth tender. It's served with rice, beans and corn tortillas, which you can always nix, and request grilled vegetables instead.

Blue Tomato's owner, Rick Smith, describes their latest creation as "sashimi-grade tuna, topped with grilled shrimp and artichoke hearts, with a lemon white wine béarnaise." Request yours "light on the sauce" and sub in a side of grilled veggies, and you've got a deliciously healthy dinner.

Everyone's welcome at the Blue Tomato. You can meet a friend for dinner and enjoy a glass of wine or an ice cold beer (light, preferably!).